THE HISTORY OF
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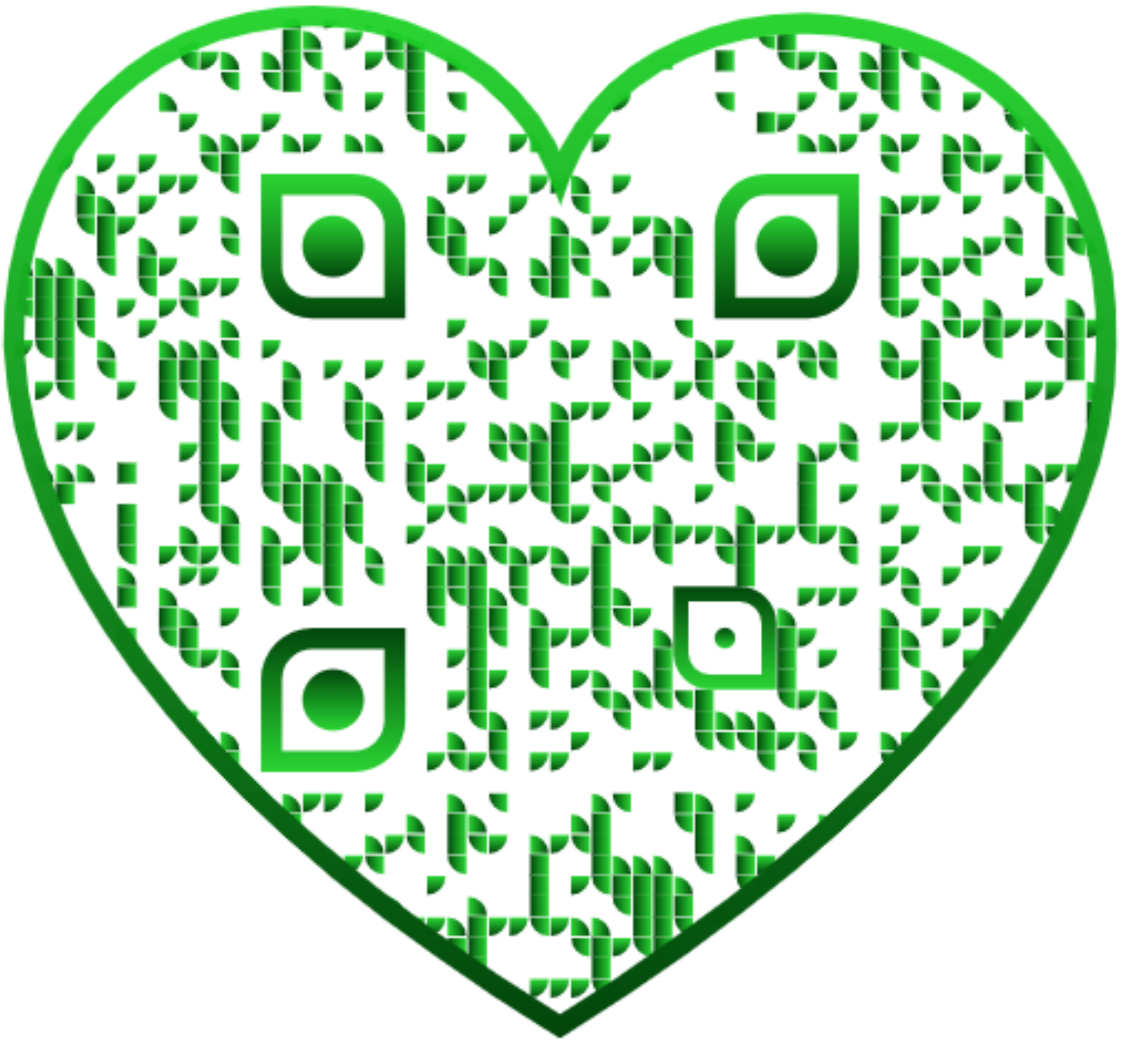

THE HISTORY OF ROCK

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Live and kicking

The great personalities of the golden age of rock 'n' roll

SOME MAY CARE to argue the point, but it is probable that all great rock has combined the music with a strong visual element – either an image or, more usually, a stage act with which the group or artist is associated. In 1957 some of the most flamboyant performers rock has ever known, personified by Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis, came centrestage in the wake of Elvis Presley, whose gyrating pelvis had caused far more parental horror than had his musical repertoire. And, inevitably, none save die-hard fans remembered Bill Haley, the ageing cowboy yodeller with the kiss curl.

The youth of America sought faces to associate with the vital new music coursing through the nation, and Jerry Lee, with his blond good looks and arrogant demeanour, filled this need perfectly. The gospel fervour with which his upbringing had fired him was originally channelled through conventional country material. It wasn't to be long, however, before he found more combustible material with which to work in 'Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On' and 'Great Balls of Fire'. These very titles implied exciting, uptempo boogie workouts, and America's record buyers were not to be disappointed.

Delivering the goods

With the success of such artists as Little Richard – in many respects Lewis' parallel in the field of black music – it was rapidly becoming apparent that it was no longer enough to deliver the goods on disc: you had to look and act the part. The still-new medium of television was scheduling rock on both sides of the Atlantic in such shows as those of Ed Sullivan and the Dorsey Brothers in the US and '6.5 Special' in the UK and the influence of these shows was soon to be reflected in record sales and the charts. The eclipse of such pioneers as Haley was further evidence to support the theory that rock'n'roll stars had to look good as well as sound good. Jerry Lee's brief two-song appearance on the Steve Allen TV show in July 1957 reached as many record buyers as a sizeable US concert tour, and there is little doubt that this swelled the singer's popularity considerably.

Three views of Jerry Lee Lewis at the Palomino Club, leading showcase for country music in America. Lewis' career saw many reverses but his indomitable spirit always brought him back up.

IN PERSON ALAN FREED
& HOLIDAY OF STARS - FATS DOMINO
JERRY LEE LEWIS - EVERLY BROS.
BUDDY HOLLY - CRICKETS - RAYS
DANNY AND JUNIORS - PAUL ANKA
ON THE SCREEN "IT'S GREAT TO BE YOUNG"
PARAMOUNT
NATIONAL SHIRT SHOPS

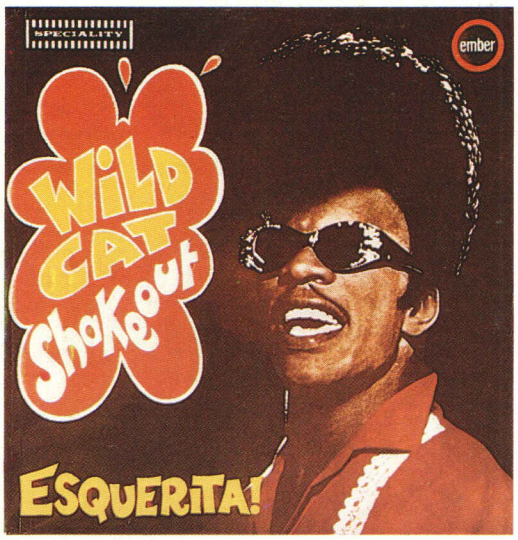
Elvis Presley served as a ready model for the rising stars of the late Fifties, when many a mikestand-wielding and guitar-toting singer sailed to fame in his wake. By the Sixties, this trend towards the guitar was to make the piano seem cumbersome and old-fashioned. But in 1957 the piano was still a mainstay of rock music and it was the instrument of some of the most charismatic performers. The restrictions it imposed could either be accepted – as they were by Fats Domino – or transcended, as they were by such performers as Richard, Lewis and Screamin' Jay Hawkins. Jerry Lee was even said to have set light to the top of his piano at the conclusion of his set when he was only second on the bill to Chuck Berry. 'I'd like to see *any* son-of-a-bitch follow that', muttered Lewis as he strode into the wings, his point proved beyond all reasonable doubt.

Recording magicians

1957 saw rock'n'roll live performances hit a peak: the shock of Elvis' arrival was more than just a remote memory, Gene Vincent was still menacing, and there seemed an endless line of ever more excessive performers from Jerry Lee Lewis igniting his piano to Screamin' Jay Hawkins emerging from his coffin. Outstanding performers like Esquerita developed their talents on package tours, while the appetite of the rock audience for larger-than-life personalities had its effect in the success of extrovert characters like the Big Bopper. But 1957 also saw the beginning of a great divide, when rock on record was realised to be different from rock on stage. Not for another 10 years were stage acts to be so important, for after 1957 rock quietened down for a decade. This was because rock'n'roll itself – the epitome of raw energy – began to fade away, unable to sustain its initial impetus in the face of music which strove to find individual, and often subtler, sounds in the recording studio.

As more sophisticated production techniques were developed there was bound, at some stage, to be a divide between stage and recorded music, with a new breed of artists concentrating on perfecting their own distinctive sound with a comparative disregard for their stage image. Two significant names in this respect which appeared in the charts for the first time in 1957 were Buddy Holly and the Everly Brothers.

Holly pitted his individual voice against the sparse, percussive backdrop of the Crickets, the sound occasionally embellished with strings and backing vocals. The Everlys showcased their shimmering vocal harmonies with a backing group which included Nashville's most seasoned session men, while in Boudleaux Bryant they possessed a songwriter of no mean calibre. In their angst-ridden romanticism, Holly and the Everlys spearheaded an equal and opposite reaction against the extrovert screaming and raving of the Richards, Lewis' and Hawkins' of rock'n'roll. In a sense, the new artists diluted the energy of rock, and even their private lives seemed to reflect this. As grist to rock'n'roll's publicity mill, however, they provided few shocks, few surprises and a mere modicum of column inches, whereas the great rock'n'rollers were often as flamboyant off-stage as on.



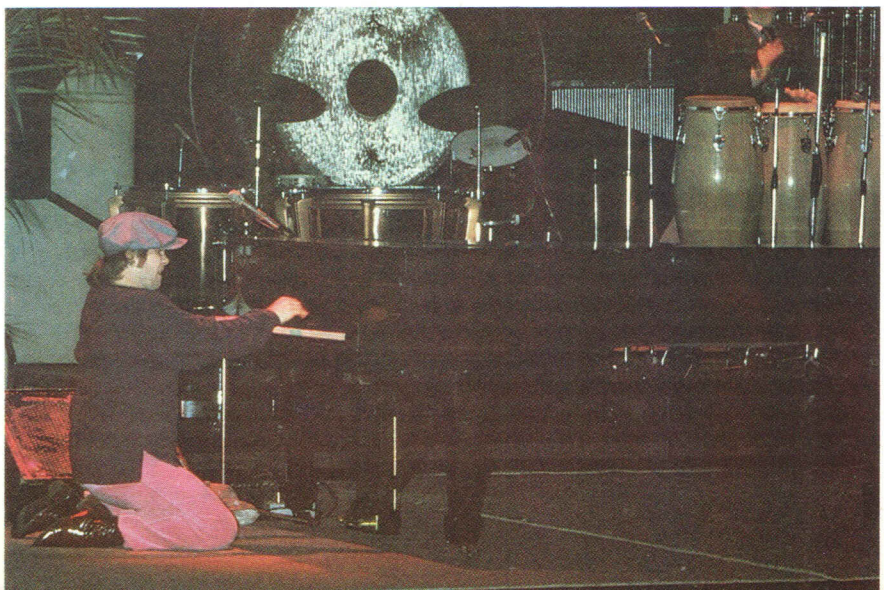
Opposite: Alan Freed and a 'holiday of stars' blaze above a trio comprising Buddy Holly (left), Jerry Lee Lewis and Joe B. Mauldin of the Crickets. Left: A record sleeve of one of the wild men of rock, S.Q. Reeder, or Esquerita as he was more commonly known. Below: Elton John carrying on the grand tradition of showmanship at the piano.

Making the headlines

Rock has kept the gossip columnists of the world's press busy for over 25 years, and Jerry Lee was the man who made the biggest stir of all. Marrying his 13 year-old cousin, shooting his bass-player and being a bigamist twice over, Lewis typified the over-the-top lifestyle which so many musicians were to emulate – and, like so many since, he paid the price when ill-health caught up with him in the mid-Seventies. Dead or alive, however, his influence has endured, most notably in performers such as Elton John. Starting in rhythm and blues and progressing through a singer-songwriting phase to become rock showman supreme, John's stage posturing clearly owes much to Lewis. Jerry Lee and Little Richard demonstrated that the ambitions of pianists in rock could extend further than those of a mere sideman or backing musician.

Time moves on, treating small-time and superstar alike, and it was inevitable that the giants of Fifties rock would eventually find new and less strenuous musical pastures. Elvis went Vegas later in his career, while Jerry Lee went country; both found a new audience, acknowledging that their pioneering days were over. Others, like Screamin' Jay Hawkins and the ill-fated Big Bopper, wrote their outrageous chapters of rock history and left the spotlight. But in 1957, rock on stage still meant raw excitement, and energetic personalities could push themselves, and their music, to the limits.

MICHAEL HEATLEY



ROCK '57

The year 1956 had seen the rise of Bill Haley, Elvis Presley and, in England, Tommy Steele. They put high explosive under the safe, comfortable post-war music business. During the summer of 1957, however, there was a temporary, just perceptible, lull. The music press, catching its breath, began to ask: 'Is it all over?'

But the second wave, when it came, saw not only a barrage of hits from the original rock pioneers, but a plethora of new artists: all-time greats – Jerry Lee Lewis and Buddy Holly – emerged in the USA, and there was a wave of activity among the less authentic but frantically enthusiastic British. Events moved with bewildering speed. It was the era of overnight sensations and new crazes. Rockabilly, calypso, and skiffle all seemed to rival rock'n'roll, as the music took off on its great expansion.

Said one newspaper editorial: 'Never before in the history of entertainment has there been anything like the colossal impact made by rock'n'roll in the past year. It has dominated disc sales, broken box office records and created a revolution in the film industry.'

January

Gibson introduce 'humbucking' pick-ups to their Les Paul guitars. The new twin-coil design helps eliminate unwanted electrical hum.

4 Tommy Steele plays nightly for 'blue bloods' at London's Café de Paris; 'The new rhythm knows no class distinctions,' says a critic.

Eddie Fisher has a smash hit with 'Cindy, Oh Cindy'.

Bill Haley's 'Rock Around The Clock' returns to the UK charts for third year running at Number 25.

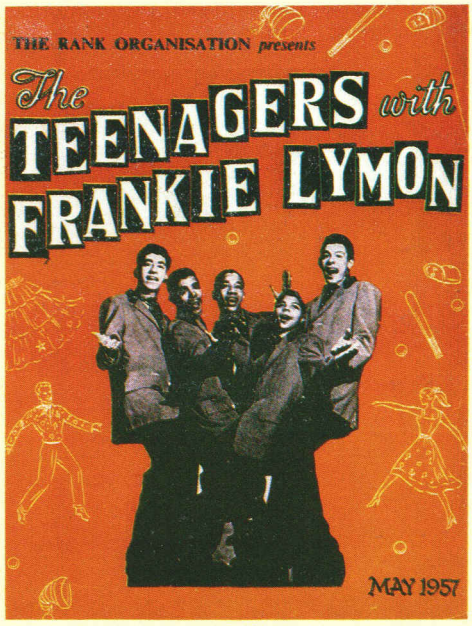
Bill Haley's new film *Don't Knock The Rock* released in USA.

11 Tickets for forthcoming Haley concerts offered for sale in UK from 5s 6d to one guinea.

Warner Bros release *Rock, Rock, Rock* movie, starring LaVern Baker and Chuck Berry.

19 Harry Belafonte enters US charts with 'Banana Boat Song', the most popular tune of the short-lived calypso craze.

'Fools Fall In Love' released on Atlantic by the Drifters; first of long chain of hits by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller.



Top: The programme for Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers' UK tour, which commenced in March. Above right: Sam Cooke, who hit the US charts in October with 'You Send Me'.

February

5 Bill Haley and the Comets arrive by boat at Southampton and board the *Daily Mirror*'s chartered train to Waterloo, where they are greeted by 4000 fans packing the station; Haley is trapped for twenty minutes. Fans go wild at their first concert at the Dominion Theatre on Tottenham Court Road.

13 New rockabilly star Buddy Knox hits the US Hot Hundred with 'Party Doll'. He also co-wrote 'I'm Stickin' With You' which, sung by Jimmy Bowen, entered the charts simultaneously.

'Rock Around The Clock' first record ever to sell over 1,000,000 copies in UK only. Total sales of all Haley records in UK over 3,000,000.

Shooting completed on first all-British rock movie, *Rock You Sinners*, starring Tony Crombie, Art Baxter, Rory Blackwell, and Don Sollash and the Rocking Horses.

15 The Coasters record 'Young Blood' and 'Searchin' '.

Sticks of dynamite thrown during a Louis Armstrong concert in Knoxville, Tennessee.

March

1 Mass hysteria at *Alan Freed Show* at Paramount Theatre, New York, starring Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers and the Platters.

12 The Platters start ten-week UK tour.

Viceroy Skiffle Board advertised for sale at 39s 6d: 'Have Fun! Complete with tap box, hooter, cowbell and washboard'.

15 14-year-old Frankie Lymon arrives in UK for tour: 'What an astonishing performer this boy is,' says UK critic.

Latest American style narrow-bottom black trousers advertised in UK at 32s 6d.

23 Fats Domino's 'I'm Walkin' ' enters US charts.

Little Richard makes double entry into UK charts with 'She's Got It' and 'The Girl Can't Help It'.

27 Elvis Presley's 'All Shook Up' reaches the US charts and becomes the first of his three Number 1 singles of 1957, the others being, 'Let Me Be Your Teddy Bear' and 'Jailhouse Rock'.

April

5 Clyde McPhatter releases 'Just To Hold My Hand' and covers Lee Andrews and the Hearts' song 'Long Lonely Nights'.

Lonnie Donegan hits with 'Cumberland Gap', reaching Number 1 in UK.

Singer Andy Williams makes the charts with 'Butterfly'.

27 New British rock singer Terry Dene makes debut on BBC-TV's hugely-successful Saturday show '6.5 Special', produced by Jack Good.

29 Marty Robbins' 'White Sport Coat' enters US charts.

Fluorescent socks in pink with rock'n'roll motif on sale at 9s 6d in the UK.

Jerry Lee Lewis plays piano on Carl Perkins' 'Matchbox' session.

May

British skiffle group boom sparked by success of Lonnie Donegan. Many skiffle groups appear, including that of Chas McDevitt, who hits with 'Freight Train'.

1 Coasters enter US charts with 'Young Blood'.

Guy Mitchell hits with 'Rock-a-Billy'.

Andy Williams in cover version battle over 'Butterfly' with Charlie Gracie.

3 18-year-old Sal Mineo hailed as 'bright new screen find' when he plays drums in the movie *Rock Pretty Baby*.

The Tommy Steele Story movie is released, featuring Humphrey Lyttleton among the guest artists.

4 Gene Vincent and the Blue Caps record 'Be-Bop-A-Lula' in Nashville.

20 'Love Letters In The Sand' by Pat Boone enters US charts.

June

1 'Rock Across The Channel' boat trip presented by Club Haley of Soho. Included

are Chas McDevitt, Rory Blackwell and Terry Dene's band. They rock from Gravesend to Calais and back for £2.
3 Everly Brothers enter US charts with 'Bye Bye Love'.
7 Paul Anka makes the US charts with his own composition 'Diana'.
9 Lonnie Donegan stars in 'Skiffle Sensation of 1957' at Royal Albert Hall, London.
16 Elvis Presley hits UK charts with 'All Shook Up' at Number 24 *before* it is released to the public: sales of American forces 45s are sufficient to get it a placing.
Art Rupe of Specialty Records launches Larry Williams with hit single 'Short Fat Fanny'.

July
14-year-old Jim Morrison, future lead singer of the Doors, quits Albuquerque public school.
1 Elvis Presley's 'Teddy Bear' enters US charts.
5 Great National Skiffle Contest organised in UK.

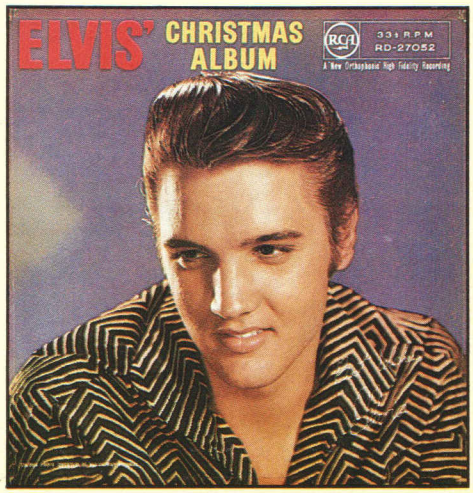
August
12 Buddy Holly's 'That'll Be The Day' enters US charts.
Frankie Lymon quits the Teenagers.
Elvis Presley's film, *Loving You* presented at London's Plaza Cinema.
Alan Lomax and Peggy Seeger guitar tutor offered for sale at 4s 6d.
19 Singing sensation Jerry Lee Lewis hits the US charts with 'Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On'.
21 Eddie Cochran releases the classic 'Twenty Flight Rock'.
Huey 'Piano' Smith has American Top Fifty hit with 'Rockin' Pneumonia And The Boogie Woogie Flu'.

September
John Lennon (16) prepares to join Liverpool Art College after the summer holidays.
8 Terry Dene stars at Royal Albert Hall with John Barry and Lonnie Donegan.
Skiffle boom continues: 'Never before have so many British people made their own music,' says critic, giving advice on how to form a group and play skiffle.
BBC-TV's top show '6.5 Special' to be made into a movie.
7 Everly Brother's 'Wake Up Little Susie' enters US charts.
Colonel Tom Parker demands 60,000 dollars for one appearance by Elvis on Dean Martin Show. 'Forget it,' says Martin.
23 First releases on Sam Phillips' 'Phillips International' label.

Top left: June chart entrants the Everly Brothers. Left: Nancy Whiskey (left), singer of the Chas McDevitt skiffle group, with Tommy Steele: both hit the headlines in May. Below: Danny and the Juniors, who formed in November. Right: Elvis Presley's seasonal smash-hit LP.

October
21-year-old Buddy Holly celebrates 1,000,000 sales of 'That'll Be The Day'.
RCA Victor celebrate greatest advance orders in history of the label for the Elvis Presley Christmas album.
Tommy Steele starts work on *The Duke Wore Jeans* movie.
26 Jackie Wilson hits with 'Reet Petite'.
Johnny Cash records 'Ballad Of A Teenage Queen'.
28 Sam Cooke has his first hit in the US with 'You Send Me'.

November
Little Richard quits rock'n'roll. The newest singing sensation stuns his fans by announcing his retirement, after a succession of six smash hits. On tour in Australia he gets religion, throws his diamond rings off Sydney Harbour bridge and becomes an evangelist.
More shocks for fans. Elvis Presley says he won't work outside the USA.
Frank Sinatra criticises Presley and his music, and Los Angeles police department orders Elvis to clean up his act.
British fans watch new ATV pop record show 'Cool For Cats'.



Danny and the Juniors form in Philadelphia.
2 Chuck Berry has his third US hit of the year with 'Rock And Roll Music'.
'Peggy Sue' by Buddy Holly enters the US charts and reaches Number 3.
16 BBC TV's '6.5 Special' televised direct from the cradle of UK rock, the 2 Is coffee bar in London's Soho.
The Crickets have a hit with 'Oh Boy', reaching Number 10 in the US charts.

December
Paul Anka tours UK.
Elvis' Christmas Album released.
Johnny Otis scores with 'Ma He's Making Eyes At Me'.
Jerry Lee Lewis has a transatlantic hit with 'Great Balls Of Fire'.
27 Elvis Presley receives formal notification of draft into US Army. Efforts made to delay entry; his induction is deferred until March 1958.

CHRIS WELCH

The KILLER

How the devil's music possessed Jerry Lee Lewis

Above: The Killer at the keyboard in 1957. Opposite top: By the Sixties, Lewis was playing smalltime clubs – often in the UK (left) and in Canada (right). But in the Seventies he made a comeback as a country star (opposite).

THERE HAVE BEEN only two figures of mythic dimension in the history of rock 'n'roll. First and foremost was Elvis Presley, the guileless star-god who rendered rock'n'roll acceptable to the masses. Then came Jerry Lee Lewis, the dark angel who personified all that was hellish and fearsome in rock'n'roll. Both men shared the influences of blues, country and gospel, but Jerry Lee's music was a purer and generally less commercial distillation of those roots. Both men exuded sexuality in their music, but of a very different sort: 'Love me tender,' Elvis softly implored, while Jerry Lee warned, 'When I start drillin' on you, baby, you're gonna lose your nightgown.'

As rock's other heroes perished or faded, Jerry Lee endured. For more than a quarter of a century – through fame and infamy, riches and destitution, bouts with alcohol and drugs, marriages and divorces, countless arrests, ill-health and lawsuits – Jerry Lee Lewis has stood as the symbol of rock'n'roll indomitability, as *the* rock survivor.

He was born in Ferriday, a small Louisiana town near the Mississippi River, on 29 September 1935, the second child of sharecropper Elmo Kidd Lewis and his wife, Mary Ethel Herron Lewis. Jerry Lee's older brother, Elmo Jr, was killed by a drunken driver in an automobile accident in the summer of 1938 and it was not until 1944 that Mamie Lewis gave birth again, to a daughter named Frankie Jean. A second daughter, Linda Gail, was born some three years later.

A musical education

Young Jerry Lee fared poorly in school, never going beyond the eighth grade, but by the age of nine he had become a passable boogie-woogie pianist. He spent much of his time at the piano in the parlour of his Uncle Lee Calhoun – Jerry Lee had, in fact, been given his middle name in honour of this uncle, the wealthiest and most powerful man in the community – or at the keyboard in the nearby Assembly of God church.

The Assembly of God was a Pentecostal sect whose members spoke in tongues and eschewed as sinful all worldly entertainment, from drinking and smoking to movies and popular music. His Pentecostal background instilled a guilt in Jerry Lee the performer that he would never wholly free himself from. In later years, he spoke frequently and grimly of his playing 'the Devil's music' and even of 'draggin' the audience to Hell with me'. It is interesting to note that Jimmy Lee Swaggart, a neighbouring cousin who learned to play at the same time and on the same pianos as Jerry Lee, went on to become one of the most successful evangelists in America.

Elmo Lewis bought Jerry Lee a piano of his own, a used Starck upright, in 1945, and the boy slowly began concocting the unlikely musical mixture that would bring him fame in the following decade. He drew from the fervid Pentecostal songs he heard at the Assembly of God, from the Al Jolson and Jimmie Rodgers records he heard on his father's phonograph, from the country singers he heard every Saturday night on the 'Grand Ole Opry' radio broadcasts and from the blues musicians who performed regularly at Haney's Big House, a club in the black part of town. The phrase rock'n'roll was unknown then, but he was playing it every day. In November 1949, less than two months after his 14th birthday, Jerry Lee gave his first public performance, at a Ford dealership celebration in downtown Ferriday. By his 15th birthday he had risen to local fame and was broadcasting his own 20-minute radio show every Saturday on WNAT, a station located across the river in Natchez, Mississippi.

Rock and religion

At the age of 15, Jerry Lee decided to forsake worldly music and dedicate his talents to God – a promise he would make and break repeatedly throughout his life. Travelling to the town of Waxahachie, Texas, he spent several months at the Southwestern Bible Institute, a school for aspiring Assembly of God ministers. He returned to Ferriday in the spring of 1951, and in February of the following year he

'Go home' shouts at singer

JERRY LEE LEWIS TAUNTED WITH 'BABY SNATCHER' BY THEATRE AUDIENCE

One of his ex-fans, attractive 21-year-old Joyce Stevens, of Camden Town, said outside the stage door of the Granada, Tooting, later: "I have all his records and used to like him.

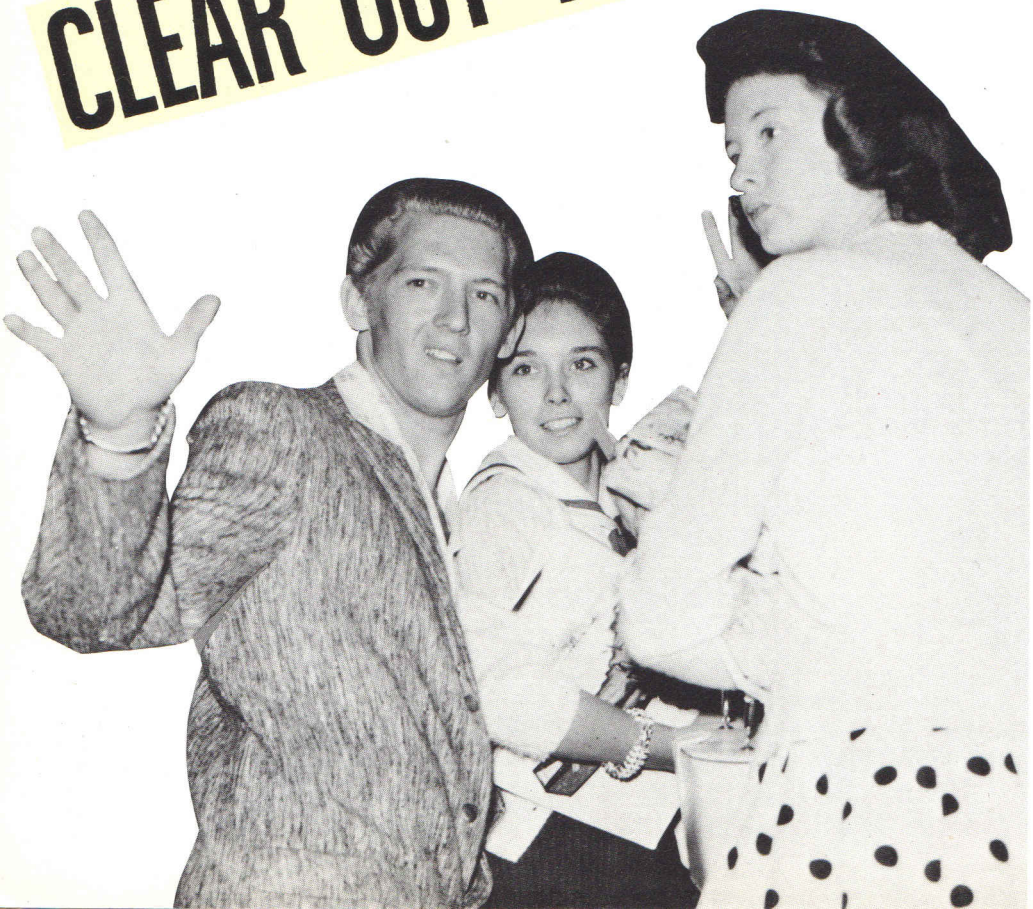
"But for a man of his age to be married three times—especially this last one, to a 13-year-old girl—is ridiculous.

"In fact, it's disgusting. He's finished as far as I'm concerned."

Said her friend, Barbara Morden, 19, of Tottenham, "We don't like him now, and neither do a lot of our friends. One of my friends has even smashed all the records she had of him."

WE HATE JERRY, SHOUT EX-FANS

CLEAR OUT THIS GANG



married Dorothy Barton, the daughter of a Pentecostal preacher. Later that year he preached for a time at Sunday services at the Church of God, another local Pentecostal church. By the summer of 1953, however, his wife had left him and he was performing nightly in unholy places along Highway 61 on the outskirts of Natchez: the 61 Club, the Hilltop Club and the Dixie Club. These were wide-open saloons, frequented by gamblers, whores and drunks, and although Jerry Lee was legally not old enough to buy a drink he made several dollars a night.

In Natchez Jerry Lee met his second wife, a 17-year-old girl named Jane Mitcham, whom he married in September 1953 without having divorced his first wife – thus becoming a bigamist at the tender age of 17. His new wife convinced Jerry Lee to quit playing in nightclubs, and he took a job as a travelling sewing-machine salesman. While so employed, he was arrested for stealing a pistol in southern Louisiana. He returned to Ferriday and to the saloons along Highway 61.

In 1954 Jerry Lee joined a band led by a WNAT disc-jockey named Johnny Littlejohn. Littlejohn's tastes were as catholic as Jerry Lee's and Lewis was to learn many of the songs with which he would later become associated from this older musician, most notably 'Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On', written by a Nashville piano-player named Roy Hall.

Jerry Lee became a father in November 1954. Following the birth of his son, Jerry Lee Jr, he made two journeys in search of fame and fortune, first to Shreveport – where he auditioned for the 'Louisiana Hayride', the radio show on which Elvis Presley had performed in October – and then to Nashville to seek a recording contract. Both trips were unsuccessful, however, and Jerry Lee returned home to rejoin Johnny Littlejohn's band. He remained with Littlejohn until autumn 1956, when he decided to go to Memphis in search of Sam Phillips, the man who had given Elvis his start two years before.

He arrived at Sun Records in Memphis only to discover that Sam Phillips was out of town. Jack Clement, a producer for Sun, recorded several renditions of country standards by Jerry Lee and advised him to return with some original material. Lewis went home to Ferriday, wrote a fast, driving boogie called 'End Of The Road', then drove north again to Memphis. Sam Phillips was once again out of town, but Clement recorded the song along with the pianist's version of 'Crazy Arms'. The lat-

When the British popular press discovered Lewis' marital indiscretions they mounted a concerted smear campaign against him. Left: Lewis prepares to leave Britain, accompanied by his wife, Myra (centre) and his sister Frankie. Despite Lewis' claims that his reputation remained intact, the outcry did his career serious damage. Opposite: Jerry Lee before and during performance.

ter was a country hit by Ray Price that had been in the charts since the past spring and Jerry Lee had been singing it with Johnny Littlejohn's band. Sam Phillips heard the tape the following week; 'I can sell that', Phillips said at once, and released Jerry Lee's first record later that month, December 1956. As always, Phillips knew talent when he heard it.

Shakin' to success

The record did not make either the national or local charts but sold well in the South and received attention from the trade weekly *Billboard*. Booked by Bob Neal, the taciturn Memphis agent who had been Elvis' first manager, Jerry Lee began touring throughout Tennessee, Arkansas and Texas with other Sun acts. It was while touring, in the first months of 1957, that Jerry Lee began once again performing 'Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On', the song he had sung so frequently with Johnny Littlejohn's band. And when Lewis was at a loss for material at his second recording session in March, someone suggested that he record the song. Sun released the record in April, a week before Jerry Lee departed for a long tour of Canada with Johnny Cash and Carl Perkins. By the time Jerry Lee returned home, 'Shakin'' had entered the Memphis C&W charts. On 12 June the record appeared in the national C&W charts, and a week later it broke into the pop charts. By the end of July, 1957, it had sold close to 100,000 copies and Jerry Lee Lewis had become a star.

Jerry Lee's performance of 'Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On' contained the essence of his music. It was really neither country nor rhythm and blues, but rather a singular combination of the two, shot through with the fiery Holy Ghost spirit of the Pentecostal hymns, joyous and threatening and sexy all at once. The record eventually held the Number 1 positions in both the C&W and R&B charts (only Elvis had previously placed a record at the top of both these charts) and also rose to Number 3 in the pop charts, selling over a million copies in the process.

More hits followed in the coming months: 'Great Balls Of Fire' (which Jerry Lee also performed in the Warner Brothers film, *Jamboree*), 'Breathless' and 'High School Confidential', the latter featured in the MGM movie of the same name. By May 1958 Jerry Lee's fame had grown to such an extent that he seemed to rival Elvis for the title of king of rock 'n'roll. Plans were made for him to fly abroad and tour Great Britain, something that Presley had never done.

Lewis' marriage to Jane had fallen asunder, and they were legally divorced a week before the singer left for London. What only a few intimate friends knew, however, was that Jerry Lee had secretly married his 13-year-old cousin, Myra Gale Brown, the previous December, five months before his divorce from Jane. Disregarding the advice of Sam Phillips, he

brought Myra Gale with him when he flew to England on 21 May 1958. After he had reluctantly revealed the facts of his marital history to the British press, a wildfire of yellow journalism blazed throughout England and spread with equal viciousness to his homeland. After performing only three of 37 scheduled shows, the tour was cancelled and Jerry Lee and his child-bride returned to America on 27 May, the day after a London newspaper editorial had declared, 'He should be deported at once. He is an undesirable alien.'

Fall from grace

When he returned home, 'High School Confidential' was high in the charts, but Jerry Lee Lewis had fallen from grace and there would be no more Top Forty hits until 1961, when 'What'd I Say' reached Number 30 and heralded a short-lived comeback. In June 1958 he re-wed Myra Gale in a ceremony of impeccable legality, hoping that this might placate the press. But it did not, and by February 1959, when Myra Gale gave birth to Steve Allen, Jerry Lee's second son, the world had all but forgotten who Jerry Lee Lewis was.

Undaunted, Jerry Lee continued to tour in the years that followed, playing for whoever would hire him. He also continued to record for Sun, although his records barely sold, and even returned – in triumph this time – to England. Lewis toured there in April 1962, barely a week after his three-year-old son had tragically drowned in the family swimming pool in Memphis. In September 1963, after almost seven years with Sun, Lewis signed with Smash Records, the new, Nashville-based subsidiary of the Mercury label. Over the course of the next four-and-a-half years, Smash released 13 singles and six albums by Jerry Lee, but none of these succeeded in resurrecting his career. Then, in January 1968, the year that his contract was to expire, he recorded a country song called 'Another Place Another Time', a hard-edged honky-tonk masterpiece of loneliness and anguish.

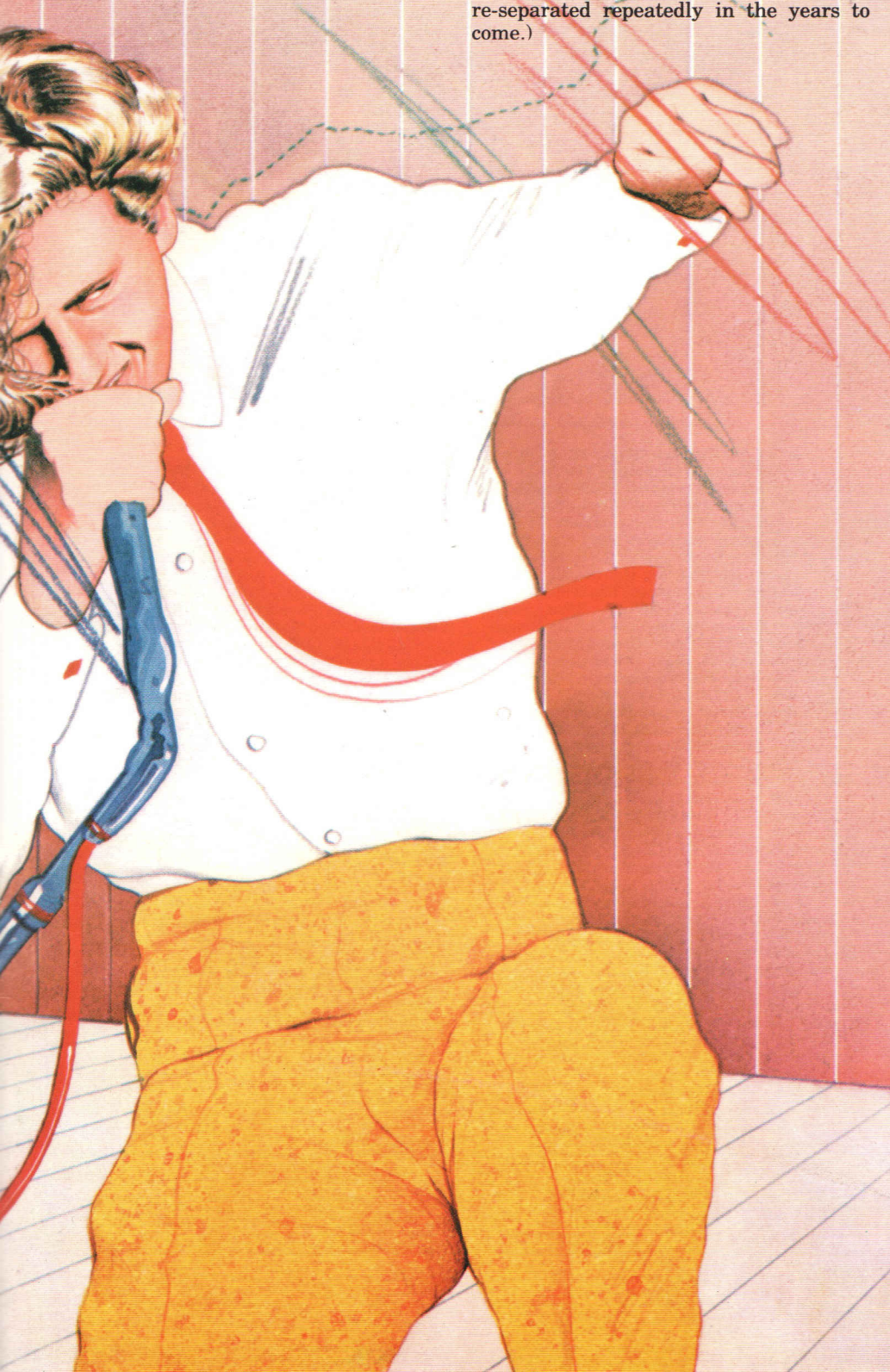
The record hit the country charts in the first week of March and rose until it was a Top Ten country hit. For the first time in ten long years, the voice of Jerry Lee

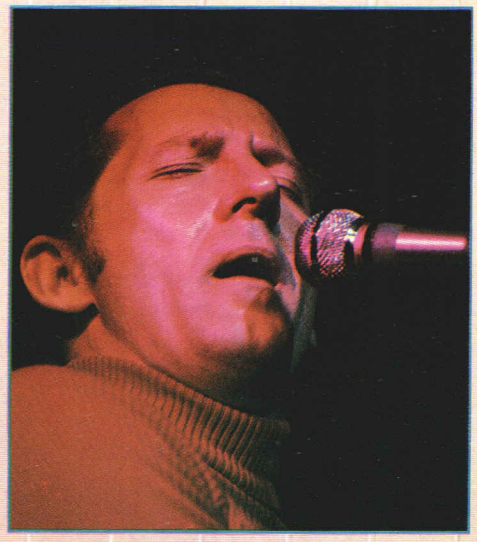
Lewis was heard throughout America. It was a different voice: older, tougher, darker and shorn of all innocence – the voice, in fact, of a great country singer.

Country classics

Risen anew as a country star, Jerry Lee had a series of hits that lasted well into the Seventies and included such classic performances as 'What's Made Milwaukee Famous' (1968), 'She Still Comes Around' (1968), 'To Make Love Sweeter For You' (1968), 'She Even Woke Me Up To Say Goodbye' (1969), 'There Must Be More To Love Than This' (1970), 'Would You Take Another Chance On Me' (1971), 'Chantilly Lace' (1972), 'Sometimes A Memory Ain't Enough' (1973), and 'He Can't Fill My Shoes' (1974). Two of his releases, 'Chantilly Lace' and 'Drinking Wine Spo-Dee-O-Dee' (the latter recorded in London in 1973 with a group of young British rock musicians), became major pop hits.

As the Seventies wore on, the effects of Jerry Lee's life and lifestyle began to show. After Myra Gale divorced him late in 1970, the singer once again cast off worldly music and embraced religion; but by the spring of 1971, when his mother died, he was back in the nightclubs, relying upon alcohol and drugs more than ever before. In October 1971 he married a 29-year-old Memphis divorcee named Jaren Elizabeth Gunn Pate, only to separate two weeks later. (They reconciled and re-separated repeatedly in the years to come.)





Far left: Lewis on stage at the Tooting Granada, 1958. Above: Still going strong in the Seventies.

In November 1973, his remaining son, Jerry Lee Jr, was killed in an automobile accident. By then Jerry Lee had become quite a problem to the Memphis police. His arrests, mostly for offences connected with drugs and alcohol, were becoming more frequent and more troublesome. This extended drugs, booze and violence spree came to a head in the autumn of 1976. On 29 September of that year – his 41st birthday – Jerry Lee shot his bass-player, Butch Owens, in the chest (but not fatally) with a .357 Magnum revolver. Several weeks later, on the morning of 22 November, he drove his Rolls-Royce into a ditch and was jailed for drunken driving. Only ten hours after being released from jail, he was arrested outside the gates of Graceland, where he was wielding a loaded Derringer pistol and demanding to see Elvis.

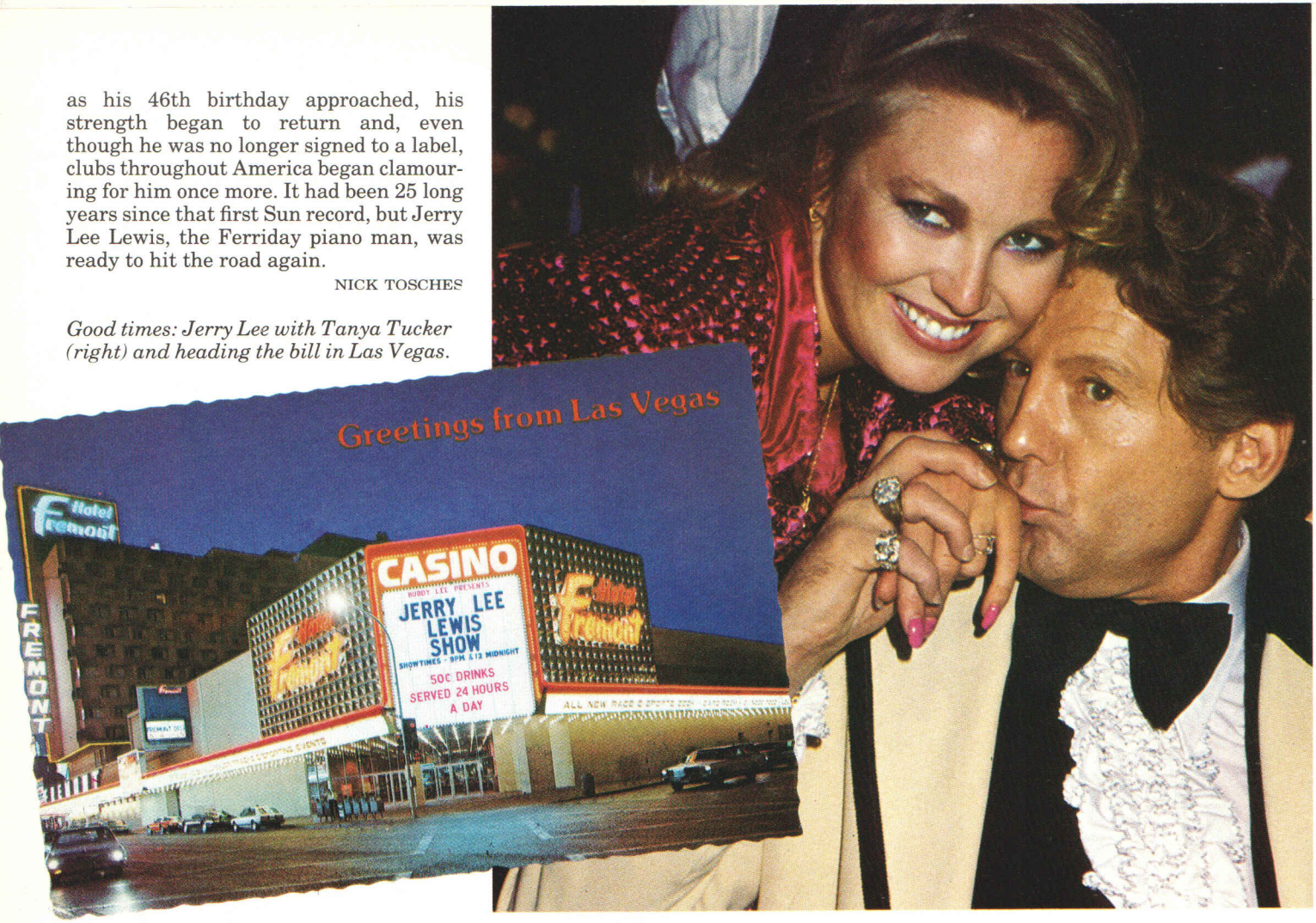
Lawsuits and surgery

Despite these vicissitudes, the country hits continued with 'Let's Put It Back Together Again' (1976), 'Middle Age Crazy' (1977) and 'I'll Find It Where I Can' (1978). In December 1977, Jerry Lee had signed a deal with Elektra Records; he recorded his first album for the label more than a year later, in January 1979. In the spring of 1981, after two more albums had been released, Elektra grew dissatisfied and, in the first week of July, filed a multi-million-dollar lawsuit against Lewis in an effort to break the contract that bound them to him. On 8 July, Jerry Lee filed a five-million-dollar counter-suit, while lying near death in a Memphis hospital following extensive stomach surgery. He charged that Elektra had 'wilfully and maliciously' violated its contract with him.

Released from hospital in August 1981, Jerry Lee Lewis was without a record company and in no shape to perform. But

as his 46th birthday approached, his strength began to return and, even though he was no longer signed to a label, clubs throughout America began clamouring for him once more. It had been 25 long years since that first Sun record, but Jerry Lee Lewis, the Ferriday piano man, was ready to hit the road again.

NICK TOSCHES



Good times: Jerry Lee with Tanya Tucker (right) and heading the bill in Las Vegas.

JERRY LEE LEWIS
Discography

Singles
Crazy Arms/End Of The Road (Sun 259, 1956); Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On/It'll Be Me (Sun 267, 1957); Great Balls Of Fire/You Win Again (Sun 281, 1957); Breathless/Down The Line (Sun 288, 1958); High School Confidential/Fools Like Me (Sun 296, 1958); The Return of Jerry Lee (narration by George Klein)/Lewis Boogie (inst.) (Sun 301, 1958); Break Up/I'll Make It Up To You (Sun 303, 1958); I'll Sail My Ship Alone/It Hurt Me So (Sun 312, 1958); Lovin' Up A Storm/Big Blon' Baby (Sun 317, 1959); Let's Talk About Us/Ballad Of Billy Joe (Sun 324, 1959); Little Queenie/I Could Never Be Ashamed Of You (Sun 330, 1959); Old Black Joe/Baby, Baby Bye Bye (Sun 337, 1960); John Henry/Hang Up My Rock'n'Roll Shoes (Sun 344, 1960); When I Get Paid/Love Made A Fool Of Me (Sun 351, 1960); In The Mood/I Get The Blues When It Rains (instrumentals by Lewis under pseudonym of the Hawk) (Philips International 3559, 1960); What'd I Say/Livin' Lovin' Wreck (Sun 356, 1961); Cold Cold Heart/It Won't Happen With Me (Sun 364, 1961); Save The Last Dance For Me/As Long As I Live (Sun 367, 1961); Money/Bonnie B (Sun 371, 1961); I've Been Twistin'/Ramblin' Rose (Sun 374, 1962); Sweet Little Sixteen/How's My Ex-Treating You (Sun 379, 1962); Good Golly Miss Molly/I Can't Trust Me In Your Arms Anymore (Sun 382, 1962); Teenage Letter/Seasons Of My Heart (Sun 384, 1963) (with Linda Gail Lewis); Hit The Road Jack/Pen And Paper (Smash 1857, 1963); I'm On Fire/Bread And Butter (Smash 1886, 1964); She Was My Baby/The Hole He Said He'd Dig For Me (Smash 1906, 1964); High Heel Sneakers/You Went Back On Your Word (Smash 1930, 1964); Carry Me Back To Old Virginia/I Know What It Means (Sun 396, 1965); Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On/Breathless (Smash 1412, 1965); Great Balls Of Fire/High School Confidential (Smash 1413, 1965); Baby Hold Me Close/I Believe In You (Smash 1969, 1965); Rockin' Pneumonia And The Boogie Woogie Flu/This Must Be The Place (Smash 1992, 1965); Green Green Grass Of Home/Baby, You've Got What It Takes (with Linda Gail Lewis) (Smash 2006, 1965); Sticks And Stones/What A Heck Of A Mess (Smash 2027, 1966); Memphis Beat/If I Had It All To Do Over (Smash 2053, 1966); It's A Hang Up Baby/Holding On (Smash 2103, 1967); Turn On Your Lovelight/Shot Gun Man (Smash 2122, 1967); Another Place, Another Time/Walkin' The Floor Over You (Smash 2146, 1968); What's Made Milwaukee Famous/All The Good Is Gone (Smash 2164, 1968); She Still Comes Around/Slippin' Around (Smash 2186, 1968); To Make Love Sweeter For You/Let's Talk About Us (Smash 2202, 1968); Don't Let Me Cross Over/We Live In Two Different Worlds (Smash 2220, 1969), (with Linda Gail Lewis); One Has My Name/I Can't Stop Loving You (Smash 2224, 1969); She Even Woke Me Up To Say Goodbye/Echoes (Smash 2244, 1969); Roll Over Beethoven/Secret Places (Smash 2254, 1969), (with Linda Gail Lewis); Once More With Feeling/You Went Out Of Your Way (Smash 2267, 1969); Invitation To Your Party/I Could Never Be Ashamed Of You (Sun International 1101, 1969); One Minute Past Eternity/Frankie and Johnnie (Sun Int. 1107, 1969); There Must Be More To Love Than This/Home Away From Home (Mercury 73099, 1970); I Can't Have A Merry Christmas Mary (Without You)/In Loving Memories (Mercury 73155, 1970); I Can't Seem To Say Goodbye/Good Night, Irene (Sun Int. 1115, 1970); Waiting For A Train/Big Legged Woman (Sun Int. 1119, 1970); Touching Home/Woman Woman (Mercury 73192, 1971); When He Walks On You/Foolish Kind Of Mán (Mercury 73227, 1971); Would You Take Another Chance On Me/Me and Bobby McGee (Mercury 73248, 1971); Love On Broadway/Matchbox (Sun Int. 1125, 1971); Your Lovin' Ways/I Can't Trust Me In Your Arms Any More (Sun Int. 1128, 1972); Chantilly Lace/Think About It Darlin' (Mercury 73273, 1972); Lonely Weekends/Turn On Your Lovelight (Mercury 73296, 1972); Me And Jesus/Handwriting On The Wall (Mercury 73303, 1972) (with Linda Gail Lewis); Who's Gonna Play This Old Piano/No Honky-Tonks In Heaven (Mercury 73328, 1972); I Can't Trust Me In Your Arms Anymore/Good Rockin' Tonight (Sun Int. 1130, 1973); No More Hanging On/The Mercy Of A Letter (Mercury 73361, 1973); Drinkin' Wine Spo-Dee-O-Dee/Rock Medley (Mercury 73374, 1973); No Headstone On My Grave/Jack Daniels (Old Number Seven) (Mercury 73402, 1973); Sometimes A Memory Ain't Enough/I Need To Pray (Mercury 73423, 1973); Just A Little Bit/Meat Man (Mercury 73462, 1974); Tell Tale Signs/Cold, Cold Morning Light (Mercury 73491, 1974); He Can't Fill My Shoes/Tomorrow's Taking Baby Away (Mercury 73618, 1974); I Can Still Hear The Music In The Restroom/Remember Me I'm The One Who Loves You (Mercury 73661, 1975); Boogie Woogie Country Man/I'm Still Jealous Of You (Mercury 73685, 1975); A Damn Good Country Song/When I Take My Vacation In Heaven (Mercury 73729, 1975); Don't Boogie Woogie/That Kind Of Fool (Mercury 73763, 1976); Let's Put It Back Together Again/Jerry Lee's Rock'n'Roll Revival Show (Mercury 73822, 1976); The Closest Thing To You/You Belong To Me (Mercury 73872, 1976); Middle-Age Crazy/Georgia On My Mind (Mercury 55011, 1977); Come On In/Who's Sorry Now (Mercury 55021, 1978); I'll Find It Where I Can/Don't Let The Stars Get In Your Eyes (Mercury 55028, 1978); Am I To Be The One/Matchbox (Sun Int. 1138, 1978); Cold, Cold Heart/Hello Josephine (Sun Int. 1141, 1979); Rockin' My Life Away/I Wish I Was Eighteen Again (Elektra E-46030, 1979); Who Will The Next Fool Be/Rita Mae (Elektra E-46067, 1979); When Two Worlds Collide/Good News Travels Fast (Elektra E-46591, 1980); Honky Tonk Stuff/Rockin' Jerry Lee (Elektra E-46642, 1980); Folsom Prison Blues/Over The Rainbow (Elektra E-47026, 1981).

Albums (selective)
Jerry Lee Lewis (Sun 1230); *Jerry Lee's Greatest* (Sun 1265); *Ole Tyme Country Music* (Sun Int. 121); *Memphis Beat* (Smash 67079); *Another Place, Another Time* (Smash 67104); *Jerry Lee Lewis* (Elektra 6E-184).

ROCK SHOCK HORROR

The spellbinding antics of Screamin' Jay Hawkins

INFAMOUSLY KNOWN as the 'original king of shock rock' or the 'weirdest one-hit wonder of them all', Screamin' Jay Hawkins fits neither bill. He's never had a 'hit' in the generally-accepted sense of the word, nor did he ever set out to be the mentor of the musically macabre. He was, however, the writer/performer of 'I Put A Spell On You', a record so strikingly eccentric, so perfectly and powerfully bizarre in concept and execution, that it still stands as a monument to the unconscious genius of the very best spontaneous extremes of rock music. By choosing to exaggerate the theme in a stage act that, in its heyday, was the most spectacular riot of lunacy on the rock'n'roll circuit, he unwittingly influenced all subsequent 'shock rock' stars and established a unique reputation that was simultaneously a millstone and lifebelt for the rest of his turbulent career.

Had he slipped straight into showbiz in his early teens like most rhythm and blues and rock'n'roll stars, it's probable that Hawkins would have emerged as either a bluesy balladeer along the lines of Billy Eckstine and Arthur Prysock, or as a jump-blues shouter in the Roy Brown/Wynonie Harris mould. But Screamin' Jay followed no regular pattern.

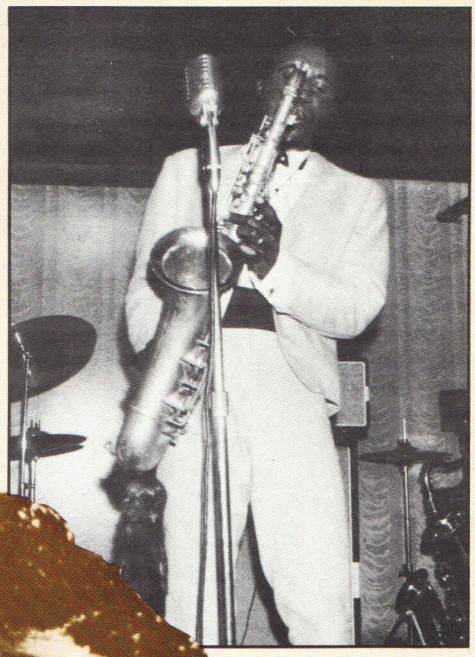
By the time he took to the stage in 1952 at the age of 23 he was a hardened campaigner. From eight years of military service and a career as a boxer (the climax of which was a bloody victory over Billy McCann to become the middleweight champion of Alaska), he leapt into the first years of the rock'n'roll boom as a new set of musical values was replacing the old. Free of inhibitions and unhampered by any ingrained musical tradition, Screamin' Jay ended up pushing to the extreme the already-flexible boundaries of rock'n'roll – both on stage and on record.

Cleveland rocker

Born Jalacy Hawkins in Cleveland, Ohio, on 18 July 1929, he grew up through the 20 years that saw the social and musical changes which brought forth rock'n'roll. Coming from a city that played no dramatic part in the musical changes (except, later, as the launching pad for DJ Alan Freed), he was more aware of the urban swing-to-jump-blues drift than anything else but was freer to absorb a broader range of music than were his contemporaries. In fact, Hawkins became a musical maverick, listing popular exponents of light opera, Hollywood film scores, country blues and all manner of jazzmen among his early favourites, alongside more obvious influences like Cab Calloway and Louis Jordan.

In his youth he was given some formal piano training, but once he'd mastered the basics he rejected his teacher. Similarly, as he was to recall, he learned the rudiments of sax technique from 'a kid around my neighbourhood called Wimpey. He showed me how to play in different keys ... the proper fingering ... then he taught me how to get out and buy records and play along till I had the records down perfect. From there I went on my own.'

On leaving the US Forces in 1952, Hawkins briefly hung around with noted saxmen Arnett Cobb, Gene Ammons, James Moody and Illinois Jacquet, while securing some small-time solo gigs and landing his first professional residency with the Tiny Grimes band, an outfit that had been one of several successful second-league R&B jump combos in the Forties and was by then en route to oblivion. During his stint with Grimes as saxman, pianist and singer, (as well as chauffeur and valet), Hawkins began to emerge as a forceful stage personality. Offsetting his limited technical ability by accentuating his assets – a megadecibel baritone voice and reckless audacity – he started screaming and clowning his way to notoriety. Also, it was at this time that Hawkins recorded his first records, though the results were unsuccessful.



Screamin' Jay in action: playing tenor sax – with shrunken head attached – at a club date (right) and posing in characteristically maniacal fashion (below).

Backing Fats

From Grimes he passed through the Lynn Hope band to a brief stay in Fats Domino's backing group. The two dramatically different personalities soon fell out: 'I began playing and jumping and dancing and leaping . . . I began to burn the stage up so hard, Fats let me go; I lost my job.' Encouraged by Wynonie Harris, however, Screamin' Jay (as he then became tagged) returned undaunted to a confidently-grounded solo career that led him via Philly-based promoter Irv Nahan and DJ Alan Freed to his unique position in rock 'n'roll history.

The turning point occurred sometime during a fuzzy two years from 1954 to 1956. Details of this period are obscured by Hawkins' riotous lifestyle, oceans of alcohol and the general mayhem of the onset of the rock'n'roll era. Before 1955 Hawkins' records were raggedly extreme but nonetheless definable examples of north-east urban R&B, among them a couple of gleefully exuberant paeans to booze ('Baptize Me In Wine', 'I Found My Way To Wine'), an update of Louis Jordan-style jump'n'jive ('Talk About Me') and a nearly fully-fledged Screamin' Jay recoil from devil women ('She Put The Whammy On Me'). After 1956 Screamin' Jay was in a class of his own.

The record that tipped him over the brink was his second version of 'I Put A Spell On You', a melodramatic love song he'd written and originally recorded in 1954. The second version, recorded at his first session for Columbia/Okeh Records, was with some of New York's top R&B sidemen of the day, including drummer Panama Francis, guitarist Mickey Baker and sax player Sam 'The Man' Taylor. The arranger was Leroy Kirkland and the producer Columbia's Arnold Maxim.

Maxim's 'production' technique was an object lesson in pertinence. He simply got everybody blind drunk – and the result was a startling performance from all concerned, especially Screamin' Jay. Over a thumping waltz tempo he shouted, screamed and grunted like a man possessed – so much so that the record was promptly banned from major airwaves for sounding 'too cannibalistic'. A second pressing with a slightly amended climax was unaccountably found more acceptable but even so, despite reports that it eventually sold a million or more, the record never appeared in the best-seller lists.

What it did, however, was greatly impress Alan Freed, who was by then broadcasting from New York, at the height of his fame and influence as the Svengali of rock'n'roll. An acquaintance of Jay's from the Cleveland days, Freed delighted in airing such an outrageous sound and was quick to promote Hawkins as the wild man of his live Rock'n'Roll Revues, paying him to open his act by slowly emerging into a stark spotlight from out of a coffin and encouraging him to develop the theme to further excess. Never one to shy away from a challenge, Hawkins soon became renowned as the freakiest star in rock.

Snakes, bells and bones

Draped in multi-coloured suits, capes, turbans, floppy hats, leopard or snakeskin shoes and brandishing a skull-topped baton entwined with snakes, bells and chicken bones, Hawkins would slink chuckling from his coffin before screaming insanely at his prey and launching into an unpredictable programme of zany rock and brooding blues, delivered with much rubber-legged prancing and maniacal stares. At the same time stooges in the balcony cascaded the stalls with rubber bands, hollering 'Worms! Worms!', while electrically-operated smoke bombs panicked the faint-hearted. 'Least expected, most effective' was Screamin' Jay's motto, and for a couple of years he more than proved the point.

Screamin' Jay delivers a warning on the evils of cigarette smoking. The skull and shrunken head were his best-known trademarks.

> 'So the producer says, "How do you act in night clubs?" "Like any other entertainer." "Do you drink?" "Yes, I drink." "Do you get drunk?" "Yeah." "Do you go on stage when you're drunk?" "Yeah." "How do you sound, drunk?" "How the hell do I know, I'm drunk, I can't remember." So he went out and got a case of whiskey and got me drunk, the whole band got drunk, and then we recorded "I Put A Spell On You."'
>
> **Screamin' Jay Hawkins** on his first Columbia session.

In 1957 he achieved a rare double when he was banned again, this time from the screen; his 'frenzy' sequence was axed from the movie *Mister Rock And Roll* on the grounds of bad taste and degrading the black peoples of America. In the same year he outdid 'Spell' with a brilliantly insane sequel, 'There's Something Wrong With You', coupled with the equally bizarre 'Alligator Wine'. Sadly the record didn't chart, Columbia dropped Screamin' Jay Hawkins and by 1958 he was on his way down.

But Screamin' Jay was never quite out.

Vacillating between a thwarted ambition to succeed as a serious balladeer and intermittent reincarnations as a spell-binding freak, Hawkins has become an enigmatic legend over the last 20 years, lurking in the sinister shadow of his reputation. The spirit of his being has been syphoned by many a later lunatic, most obviously in Britain by Screamin' Lord Sutch and Arthur Brown but also by the likes of Alice Cooper and George 'Funkadelic' Clinton, who was an avid young fan of Jay's Fifties stage show.

On record, through a succession of short-term alliances with more than a dozen companies, he has continued to surprise and delight with such mind-boggling performances as 'I Hear Voices', 'Poor Folks', 'Feast Of The Mau Mau' and 'Armpit No 6' but it has been left to other artists to earn him royalties; 'Spell' has now been recorded so often it can almost be regarded as a standard. Among the more successful versions have been those by Nina Simone, Alan Price and Creedence Clearwater Revival.

Screamin' Jay Hawkins was still active in and around New York in the early Eighties, where he recorded with the Rolling Stones' rhythm guitarist Keith Richards and drew a packed house to one of his infrequent live appearances. But he has never re-emerged from his status as a minor cult figure; one of the great personalities of rock, but one of the least known.

CLIFF WHITE

SCREAMIN' JAY HAWKINS
Discography

Singles

Jalacy Hawkins with the Tiny Grimes Band
Why Do You Waste My Time/Carnation Hop Boogie (inst.) (Gotham 295, 1952).

Jalacy Hawkins
Not Any More/Baptize Me In Wine (Timely 1004, 1954); Please Try To Understand/I Found My Way To Wine (Timely 1005, 1954).

Jay Hawkins
This Is All/She Put The Whammy On Me (Mercury 70549, 1955); You're All Of My Life To Me/Well I Tried (Wing 90005, 1955); Even Though/Talk About Me (Wing 90055, 1956); Take Me Back/I Is (Grand 135, 1956).

Screamin' Jay Hawkins
Not Anymore/Please Try To Understand (Apollo 506, 1957); Baptize Me In Wine/Not Anymore (Apollo 528, 1958); I Put A Spell On You/Little Demon (Okeh 7072, 1956); You Made Me Love You/Darling Please Forgive Me (Okeh 7084); Frenzy/Person to Person (Okeh 7087, 1957); Alligator Wine/There's Something Wrong With You (Okeh 7101, 1957); I Hear Voices/Just Don't Care (Enrica 1010, 1962); Ashes/Nitty Gritty [with Pat Newborn] (Chancellor 1010, 1962); The Whammy/Strange (Roulette 4597, 1963); Poor Folks/My Kind Of Love (Providence 411, 1966); I'm Not Made Of Clay/All Night (Decca 32019, 1967); You're An Exception To The Rule/I Put A Spell On You (Decca 32100, 1967); I'm Lonely/Stone Crazy (Philips 40606, 1969); Do You Really Love Me/Constipation Blues (Philips 40645, 1969); Too Many Teardrops/Makaha Waves (Philips 40636, 1970, released in Hawaii only); Moanin' (Philips 40668, probably not issued); Our Love Is Not For Three/Take Me Back (Philips 40674, 1970); Monkberry Moon Delight/Sweet Ginny (Queen Bee 1313/14, 1971); Africa Gone Funky Part 1/Africa Gone Funky Part 2 (London 194, 1973); Vou-Doo/You Put The Spell On Me (RCA 10127, 1974); I Put A Spell On You/Africa Gone Funky (Versatile 700, 1977); I Put A Spell On You/Armpit No. 6 (EG/Polydor 183, 1981, UK Issue).

Albums

At Home With Screamin' Jay Hawkins (Epic LN 3448); *I Put A Spell On You* (Direction 8 – 63481); *What That Is* (Philips PHS 600-319); *Screamin' Jay Hawkins* (Philips PHS 600-336); *Screamin' The Blues* (Red Lightnin' RL 0025).

A turbaned Hawkins plays the fool for this publicity shot, surrounded by Screamin' Jay paraphernalia. Sometimes the snake was real, and it was rumoured that Hawkins occasionally donated it to the front rows of the audience.

He was called BIG BOPPER

The singing Texas DJ who rocked over the airwaves

J.P. RICHARDSON, the self-styled 'Big Bopper', was one of the true characters of Southern rock'n'roll. He was not a musical innovator, far less a pretty teenage puppet. He was a personality, a Texan DJ of large frame, crewcut and stetson who wrote comical rock'n'roll songs – and did so successfully: 'Chantilly Lace' was a Top Ten hit for the Bopper in 1958, while Johnny Preston and George Jones scored with 'Running Bear' and 'White Lightning' respectively. Unfortunately the Bopper is usually only remembered in the context of Buddy Holly and Ritchie Valens, more famous for his death in the 1959 plane crash which claimed their lives than for his recordings. It often goes unrecognised that the Bopper's short life was more interesting than his unscheduled death.

Joking and jive-talk

Richardson was born near Sabine Pass in East Texas, on 24 October 1930 and was raised, musically-speaking, on the country-swing music of the Forties. He went to school in Beaumont, Texas, where he combined a keen interest in practical joking with compering the school entertainments. While still at school he became a part-time DJ in Beaumont, developing a microphone presence to match his large physical frame.

In the very early Fifties Richardson was playing hot jazz and country records at the KTRM radio station in Beaumont, and in 1952 was voted 'top DJ' in the locality. This was, no doubt, on account of his ebullient personality and brash style. 'The Bopper, as he later called himself', said one of his competitors, 'had some talent, but it wouldn't have mattered to him if he didn't.' Richardson's musical career was interrupted by the Korean War when he was conscripted in 1953, and it was late 1954 before he had completed a compulsory two-year stretch in the US Army and was back in Beaumont, working as Programme Director at KTRM. It was then that he began to write songs and branch out into the music business. He was briefly involved in artist management and also sent demo tapes of his songs to record companies; the recipients included Pappy Daily of Starday Records in Houston, who had several singing DJs on his books.

J.P. Richardson in his Big Bopper guise and (left) the LP that featured his most famous single.

Richardson's first recording venture, however, was in Crowley, Louisiana, at the studios of Jay Miller's Feature Records. He made three demo recordings for Miller, backed by drums, guitar and a local black pianist, Leon 'Peaches' Stirling, a blind man who later joined Ray Charles' band. Richardson had met Miller at DJ conventions and for a time used his DJ's knowledge and connections to obtain sidemen for Miller's sessions – it was often necessary to bail them out of jail. The three demos vary widely: 'Pet Names' was an undistinguished country ballad, 'Sippin' Cider' was a rocker with a stuttering vocal style that the Bopper would later use effectively, while 'Boogie Woogie' was a happy R&B workout with Richardson shouting a string of breathless blues refrains. In truth, Richardson's adequate bass voice was fine for boogies but was not well-suited to ballads, a fact which stood out dramatically later on when ballads were to be encountered on a flipside or sandwiched between rockers on an LP.

None of the Miller recordings were released at the time, and meanwhile Richardson moved on to MGM Records. Pappy Daily in Houston then came up with a deal through which two country singles were released by Mercury under the name of Jape Richardson. These first recordings featured both the serious and the humorous sides of the singer, in the ballad 'Beggar To A King' and the comic 'Monkey Song' respectively. Neither sold well, but 'Crazy Blues' was an effective, eerie, mid-paced rockabilly recording.

Selecting a name

Richardson stepped up his songwriting and recording activities during 1958. He was also doing TV commercials and one, for a lawnmower, nearly caused him to adopt the name, the 'Big Yazoo'. He was persuaded that the 'Big Bopper' sounded better for the music business and he used this title in future on radio and on records, recording for the first time under the name in mid 1958. In answer to country singer Sheb Woolley's surprise hit 'The Purple People Eater', the Bopper recorded 'The Purple People Eater Meets The Witchdoctor' for Pappy Daily's new D label. The flip, hastily written and recorded at the actual session and based on a radio catchphrase, was 'That's What I Like'. It was only with difficulty that Daily persuaded the Bopper to change the title to 'Chantilly Lace', the first words of the catchy chorus. Other DJs soon picked 'Chantilly Lace' as the hit side, and when Daily leased the record to Mercury this was the side that was plugged.

'Chantilly Lace' entered the US pop charts in August 1958 and rose to Number 6 that autumn, also appearing in the R&B Top Ten. It was a relentless rocker with a galloping bass guitar figure, pounding piano and a riffing sax played by cajun musician Link Davis. The Bopper told his story of a telephone conversation in a booming, half-spoken, insinuating voice. The record sold as a novelty dance rocker in which the Bopper tells his teenage girl what he likes about her dress and style. The lyrics were a cleaned-up version of the verses that had been pioneered at parties and conventions and which led up

THE BIG BOPPER (J.P. Richardson) Discography

Singles
As Jape Richardson
Crazy Blues/Beggar To A King (Mercury 71219, 1957); Monkey Song/Teenage Moon (Mercury 71312, 1957).

As The Big Bopper
Chantilly Lace/Purple People Eater Meets The Witch Doctor (D-1008, 1958); Chantilly Lace/Purple People Eater Meets The Witch Doctor (Mercury 71343, 1958); Little Red Riding Hood/Big Bopper's Wedding (Mercury 71375, 1958); Walking Through My Dreams/Someone Is Watching Over You (Mercury 71416, 1958); It's The Truth Ruth/That's What I'm Talkin' About (Mercury 71451, 1959); Pink Petticoats/The Clock (Mercury 71482, 1959).

Albums
Chantilly Lace Starring The Big Bopper (Mercury LP 20402) (Includes Chantilly Lace, Little Red Riding Hood and most of the Big Bopper's Mercury singles); *Louisiana Swamp Pop* (Flyright LP 532) (Includes Boogie Woogie; this track was the Big Bopper's first recording and remained unissued until 1977).

to the singer's leery catchphrase, 'you knoooow what I like'.

At the end of the year, the Big Bopper had further Mercury hits with 'Big Bopper's Wedding' and 'Little Red Riding Hood', two more pounding comedy rockers that were issued together on the same single.

The last dance

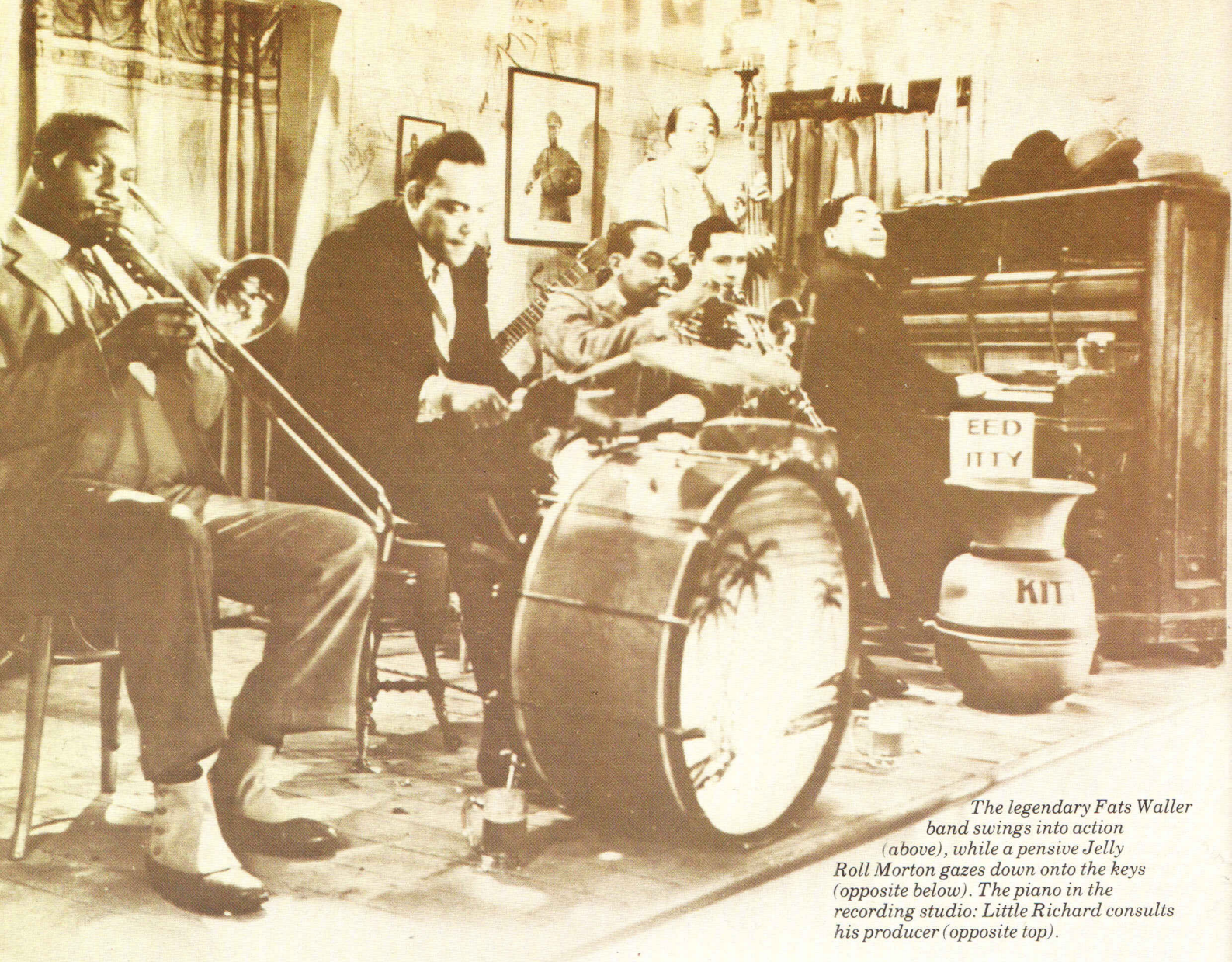
On the strength of his hits, Richardson was booked to take time off from radio and join Buddy Holly's 'Winter Dance Party' tour of the Mid-West. The shows were a success for the Bopper, but winter was not the best time of year for travelling around in a bus and, on 3 February, Buddy Holly decided to charter a plane instead for his band. The Bopper had developed a cold and persuaded Waylon Jennings, Holly's bass player, to sell him his seat on the plane. In bad weather, the light aircraft crashed near Clear Lake, Iowa, killing all inside. This tragic accident cut short the careers of some of the most exciting talents in rock'n'roll. Richardson was 29 years old and on the verge of stardom – one can only wonder where his talent would have led him.

The Big Bopper's recorded backlog was not great, since he had only been in the national spotlight for six months, and there were no posthumous hits. There were, however, one or two good collectors' items, including 'Bopper 486609' by Donna Dameron on Daily's Dart label. This had been written by Richardson as the 'answer' phone call to 'Chantilly Lace' and was sung in an appealing Connie Francis style.

In 1959 Mercury issued an LP, mainly comic rockers including 'White Lightning', 'It's The Truth Ruth' and 'Preacher and The Bear'. Musically these were similar to the Bopper's better-known hits, but the songs' common denominator was a lyrical flair that transformed a mixture of jive-talk, old blues refrains and trite rhymes into potential pop hits.

MARTIN HAWKINS

Above: The Big Bopper (right) at a DJ convention and making some suggestions down the phone, 'Chantilly Lace' style (below).



The legendary Fats Waller band swings into action (above), while a pensive Jelly Roll Morton gazes down onto the keys (opposite below). The piano in the recording studio: Little Richard consults his producer (opposite top).

HAMMERS & KEYS

The piano: from ragtime to rock 'n' roll

UNTIL THE MIDDLE of the present century, the piano was at home everywhere: in bar-room or Baptist church, in concert-hall or cottage parlour. It was the complete musical instrument, sufficient unto itself and needing no accompaniment – ready to play rolling blues, sentimental ballads, Bach chorales or Strauss waltzes.

But the piano's reign in rock'n'roll was to be short-lived. Aspiring rock stars would not choose this cumbersome, self-effacing and patently unsexy instrument; the electric guitar and saxophone were far more amenable to extrovert behaviour – Jerry Lee and Little Richard notwithstanding.

The distinctive rock piano style has its roots in the 19th century. Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-69), a conservatoire-trained virtuoso from New Orleans, travelled widely in Central and Latin America. Folk influences from there and from the West Indies formed a fascinating style in his music that forged a link, as it were, between the drawing-room pieces of Chopin (a great admirer of Gottschalk) and the gritty cat-house rags of Scott Joplin. The most notable features of the developing style were a rippling, arpeggiated right hand set against the left hand's predictable, four-square marching bass.

Ragtime roots

Although much of it was designed to sound *extempore*, Joplin's own fully-fledged ragtime was all meticulously notated, as it was the composer's profound (but frustrated) wish to be accepted as a serious musician. But rag syncopation only achieved a temporary favour with a handful of 'classical' composers such as Debussy, Satie and Stravinsky. The ragtime craze spread instead into less-elevated musical echelons: those of gospel music, dance halls and beer saloons, where vamping pianists provided an amiable accompaniment to the pleasures of singing, drinking and sex.

The tempo of the music increased and, as it grew faster, so its left-hand style was

gradually modified into the familiar, crawling bass of broken octaves that was the defining feature of boogie-woogie piano. Its great exponents in the inter-war years, such as Meade 'Lux' Lewis, Jelly Roll Morton and James P. Johnson, evolved many of the clichés that were seminal to the evolution of keyboard rock 'n'roll. Such pieces of the period as Albert Ammons' 'Honky-Tonk Train Blues' are musically not far removed from the rock 'n'roll that was to dominate the scene in the Fifties.

In the Twenties and Thirties, too, the tradition of the pianist as extrovert entertainer developed, under the powerful influence of Fats Waller, a man who could play, sing and hold an audience spellbound with his personality. Waller was not into shock or horror, but his appeal was basically that of the rock pianists: the audience felt that the music was given a new dimension by the irrepressible personality of the man at the keyboard.

Boogie woogie, rhythm and blues, the pianist as entertainer – all these influences came out in the Fifties.

One of the greatest rock'n'roll pianists, Fats Domino, has his own roots firmly in rhythm and blues and traditional jazz; his uncle had worked for some time with the legendary Kid Ory. The influence Domino was to exert on the new music of the Fifties was firmly linked to the country and gospel styles of an earlier generation. It was not that he had any need to change his own personal keyboard approach: rock'n'roll *was* the shuffle rhythms that Fats Domino played. His performances in numbers like 'Ain't It A Shame', and the rolling triplets on 'Blueberry Hill' were, and remain, irresistible.

Hammering out the beat

The piano could not be claimed to be one of rock's front-line solo instruments, however. Its function was essentially rhythmic: bone-crunching repeated chords hammered out the beat of the song, or accompanied it at the extreme ends of the keyboard – the familiar fast-moving bass punctuated by shrill interjections high up in the treble. These interjections would often take the form of chord clusters, or the little four-note flicks whose sound resembled the squealing piccolos so beloved as a counterpoint in American military music.

A master of this latter style was Jerry Lee Lewis. As a youth, he had studied for the ministry in Texas before earning his living by singing and playing the piano in nightclubs. Lewis's gospel background is easy to hear in his first hit recording, 'Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On'. The piano playing on his next disc, 'Great Balls Of Fire', however, is both original and more attractive. The flamboyance of his inimitable style was shared by a close contemporary, Little Richard. Like Lewis, Little Richard had been influenced by gospel. He also shared with Lewis an approach to the piano that depended on a fast-paced and eccentric vitality for its appeal. And the appeal was immense: over a two-year period, 'Tutti Frutti', 'Long Tall Sally', 'Rip it Up', 'Good Golly Miss Molly' and 'Keep A Knockin'' were all golden discs for Little Richard and his long-suffering piano.

During the mid Fifties, when rock'n'roll piano was at its zenith, a whole crop of wild piano players emerged alongside Little Richard and Jerry Lee, including Larry Williams, Esquerita (S.Q. Reeder) and Huey Smith. All these artists realised the necessity for flamboyance in live performance in order to star as pianists. (Not that playing the piano looks easy but, in performance, what the fingers are doing is all but concealed from the audience.) Thus, they tended to be more extreme than most in their stage act. Histrionics helped to remove from the piano its comfortable air of familiar domesticity: indeed, such diverse non-rock performers as Liberace, Winifred Atwell and Russ Conway all became famous for what they did while at the piano as much as for what they did to it.

Singers and sessions

Another vital function of the piano in rock's early years (and beyond) was as a composing instrument. Before the days of demo discs, there was a piano in every record producer's office. Songs were both written and auditioned at the instrument: it is scarcely surprising, therefore, that the piano should feature prominently even on records by artists who were not pianists themselves – Danny and the Juniors' 'At The Hop' (reaching Number 1 in 1957), was a good example.

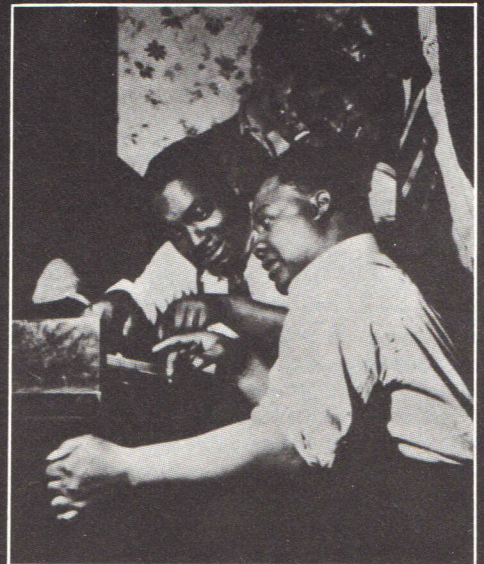
Since electronics took over so much of the rock scene, the piano has made much rarer appearances in the front line of rock – it can hardly compete in terms of power and variety with the modern battery of keyboards – but it still has its place. A few artists, such as Billy Preston, continue to feature it on recordings of other stars. He was the only session player ever to be credited by the Beatles on any of their releases, for work on their *Let It Be* album. And although for the most part the piano is still used merely to lend a classical, quasi-symphonic sound to ballads and slow romantic arrangements, it can add

Billy Preston at the keyboard with singer Syreeta (above). Little Richard (right) and below, Albert Ammons and Meade 'Lux' Lewis search for the lost chord.

intriguing pastiche or even parody effects: 10cc's 'I'm Not In Love' and the Beatles 'Martha My Dear' are two witty examples.

No electric keyboard can hope to achieve the same feel and response that the traditional acoustic piano boasts. The rock style, too, is hardly one that needs any involved training: accordingly, the rock'n'roll tradition continues to thrive among imitators of the three great originals, Fats Domino, Little Richard and Jerry Lee. And if further proof were needed of the mileage remaining in rock piano, there is still no self-respecting recording studio in the world without its Steinway or Bösendorfer.

CLIVE UNGER-HAMILTON



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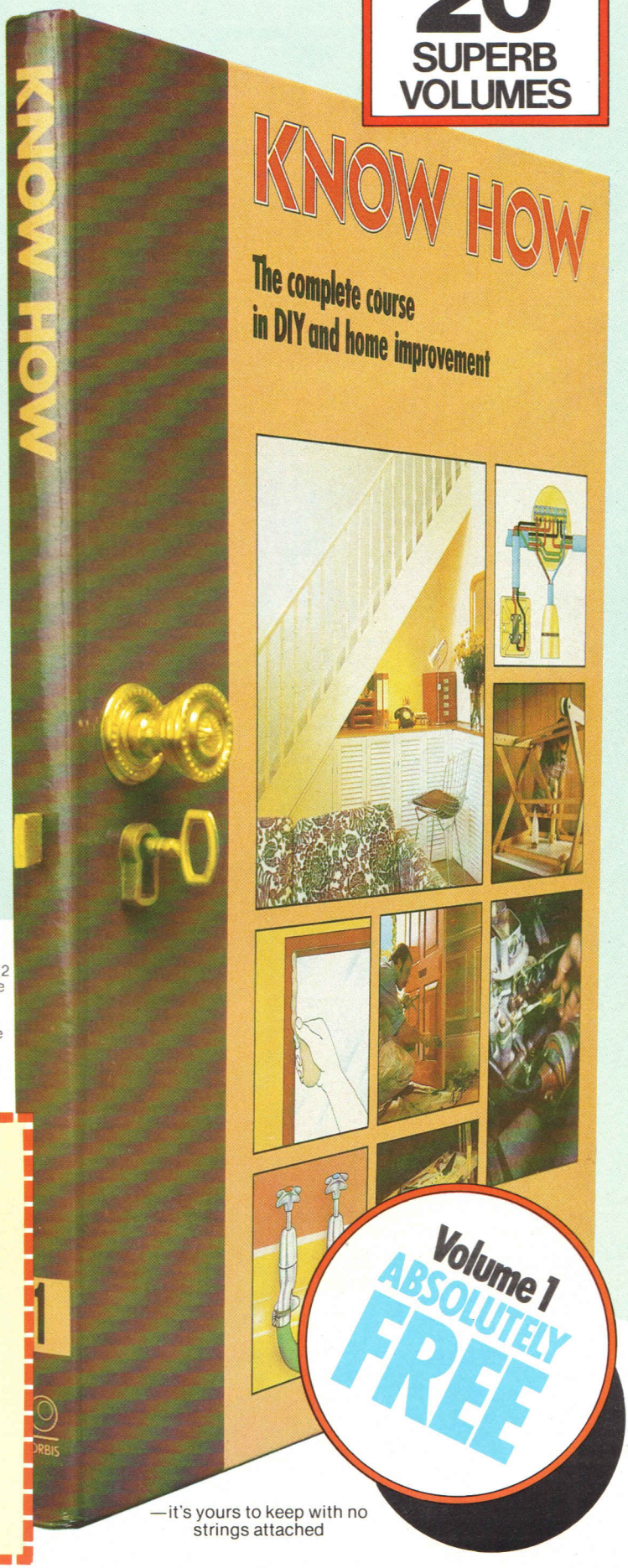

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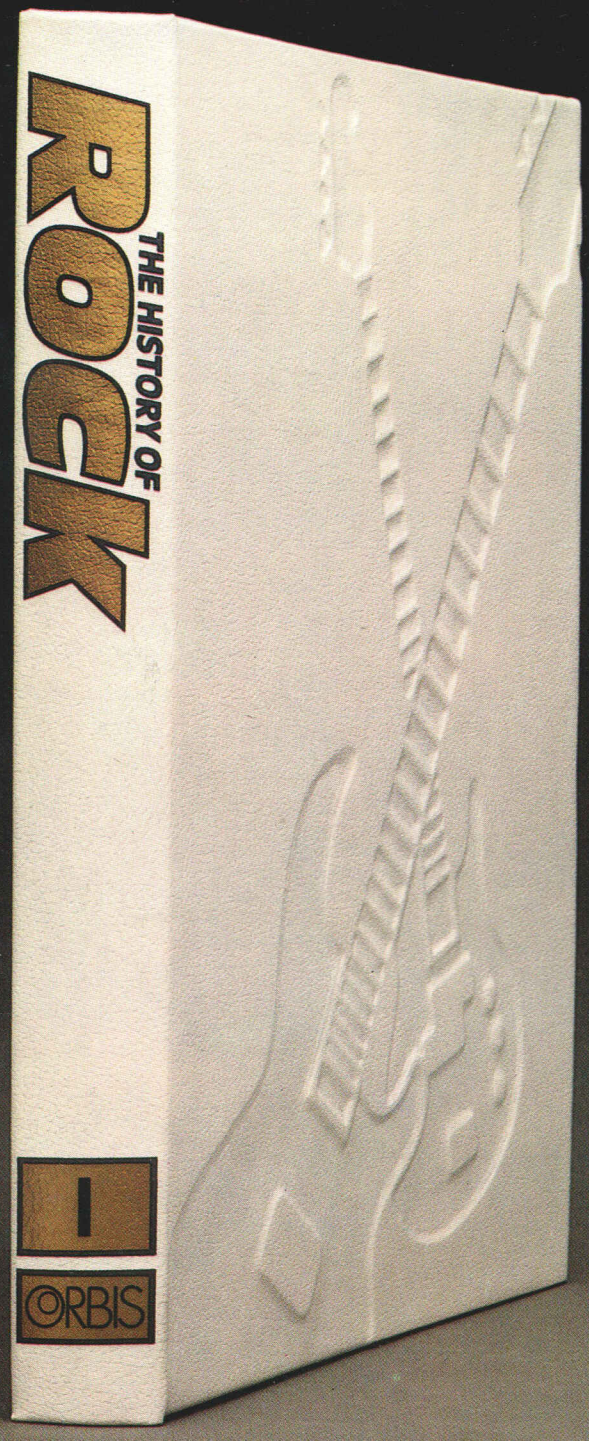

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